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NEW LAND, NEW LIFE

Sometimes resettlement in a safe country is the only durable solution for refugees who, having escaped violence or conflict in their own countries, still find their lives threatened for racial, political or religious reasons. Resettlement may also be used for survivors of torture, or for disabled, injured and severely traumatized refugees who are unable to obtain treatment where they are.

But resettlement is not only for urgent cases in crisis situations. It is a legitimate tool of international protection that strengthens the principle of first asylum, and helps to solve long-standing refugee problems in a spirit of international solidarity and responsibility-sharing.

Surprisingly often, resettlement turns out to be a winning proposition for both sides – with refugees introducing new skills and

arts and tastes to enrich the host societies, while they and their families in turn are able to live more useful and rewarding lives, safely distanced from the dangers they once fled.

There are now 17 countries offering resettlement places, and UNHCR has continued to work to expand their capacity and to encourage more countries to accept asylum seekers. In 2004, the nine main resettlement countries were United States, Canada, Australia, Norway, Sweden, New Zealand, Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands, and the eight new host countries were, by alphabetical order, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, Iceland, Ireland, Spain and United Kingdom.

THE SEARCH FOR DURABLE SOLUTIONS

Refugees are unwilling pawns in a game over which they have no control. For whatever reason – usually persecution or conflict – they have been presented with the stark choice of either facing death and destruction or fleeing their homes and communities. Forced to accept the latter option, they find themselves uprooted and living in an alien and sometimes hostile environment that, while certainly safer than the one from which they have escaped, cannot in any way be thought of as "home".

Although the protection of refugees remains the mandate of UNHCR, our ultimate goal has always been to look for "durable

solutions", where they no longer need us. Logically, the best way is to create the conditions in which people no longer need to be refugees, either because they have been able to return home safely, or have successfully integrated into their country of refuge, or have succeeded in resettling in a third country.

Our goal, therefore, is to help refugees regain that most basic of human needs: a place to call home where they can rebuild their lives in safety and dignity. To meet this goal, we

make a special plea on this World Refugee Day to those of us who have homes: help us help the millions of refugees who have none.



**World Refugee Day
20 June**



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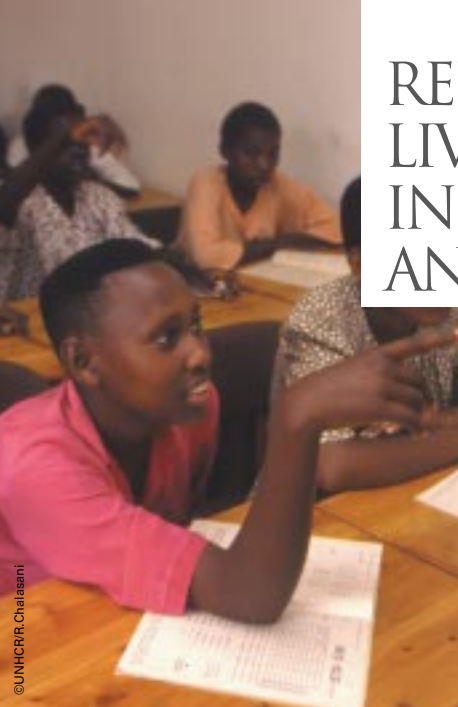


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A PLACE TO CALL HOME

World Refugee Day, 20 June





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REBUILDING LIVES IN SAFETY AND DIGNITY

in a faraway land. Or a decision to put down roots in an adopted country. Whatever the options, "home", with its associations of safety, warmth, neighbourliness and permanence, is a foundation upon which refugee families can construct a positive and hopeful future.

Finding them a home is our goal too, and when the last refugee has gone, we'll willingly take down the UNHCR sign, turn out the lights, and lock the door. In the meantime, though, we are still very much in business, continuing to pursue one of our main missions: to help refugees find what we call "durable solutions" to their plight – to help them find a place to call home, where they can rebuild their lives in safety and dignity.

It's a deceptively simple description of a hugely difficult goal, and when you add up all the things that need to be done to give 20 million lives half a chance of being rebuilt in safety and dignity, the commitment can seem overwhelming.

It could be a battle-damaged flat in Kabul, a sticks-and-grass hut in Rwanda, a palm-thatch shack in Sri Lanka, a mud-brick dwelling in Guatemala or a repaired barn in Bosnia. Or perhaps a completely fresh start

COMING BACK

The way back is often a hard one. But no matter how rough or long the journey, it is a road that does lead to home, and with it a chance to rebuild lives in safety and dignity. This is why returning is widely recognized as the most desirable durable solution, and the one generally preferred both by UNHCR and most refugees.

Refugees often come back to a country gutted by conflict and ravaged by hate. Their absence might be judged as desertion, and they may still be the target of the ethnic rivalries which erupted and caused them to flee in the first place. But for millions of refugees, voluntary repatriation remains the most preferred durable solution to their plight, and a key priority is to engineer a smooth transition from emergency relief to the kind of longer-term development that can provide the basis of a stable, safe environment.

The 4Rs programme, an initiative of UN High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers, aims to achieve this transition



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through *Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction*. Enlisting the active participation of humanitarian and development agencies, and the World Bank, the programme links all four processes to reduce poverty, and to encourage good local governance, protection of the rights of returnees, improved social services and infrastructure, economic revival and livelihood creation, and improved access to services.

As High Commissioner Lubbers puts it, "While returning home is one thing, staying home can be quite another. That is why it is crucial that the international community work to ensure that refugee returns are sustainable through large-scale post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes and projects in countries of origin."



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PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

Sometimes returning home is not a valid option: civil wars, and violence that causes refugees to flee, go on for years – and even decades. The conditions at home may be so unstable, and hope of improvement in the future so dim, that settling in the country of asylum is a safer bet than repatriation.

Indeed, some conflicts are so protracted that even if conditions ultimately return to an acceptable level, many refugees have lived in the host country for so long that they have begun to put down roots – why be strangers in their own lands when often they have married into the local community, and already feel at home there? Why not recognize the status quo, and legally integrate them? It's an important durable solution, and the challenge is to make it work by convincing the host authorities that refugees are an

economic asset with skills that can contribute to local development.

This challenge has spurred an important new UNHCR initiative designed to encourage local integration. Still in the development stage, DLI (*Development through Local Integration*) is based on the fact that the presence of refugees should justify needed additional foreign aid for development projects – projects that can benefit the community as a whole. DLI is therefore intended to persuade the authorities that integration is possible with additional development funds that help achieve greater self-reliance for refugees, as well as improved quality of life for host communities.